

I believe these types of proposals are a good starting point for a serious discussion about entitlement reform. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will want to be part of this conversation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I will yield the floor for my distinguished friend from Florida, Senator NELSON, with the understanding that I will be recognized at the conclusion of his remarks.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Florida.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I wish to address the issue of gun violence. I think my colleague from Rhode Island is going to be addressing this issue on which he has shown tremendous leadership. It will be a continuing issue over the next several weeks as we get ready to consider legislation.

My approach is one of common sense and moderation. I come to this issue as a hunter, as a kid who grew up on a ranch having guns all my life, being very familiar and comfortable with guns and to this day enjoying hunting, although my hunting has primarily been limited to quail, but I enjoy that so much with my son, although I might say that I was hunting Burmese pythons in the Everglades last week, but people do not have to hunt them with guns. Since they are taking over the Everglades, they are caught and then euthanized and, hopefully, we can stop this proliferation of Burmese pythons that are eating up everything in the Everglades, including alligators. But that is a subject for another day.

The subject before us is gun violence. Is there anybody who does not realistically, with common sense, think we should do a criminal background check for anyone who is purchasing a gun? That is about as common sense, as moderate a position one can take given the circumstances we find ourselves in with people who go in and start slaughtering innocent children. Maybe that is the one thing we can get over 60 votes for in this Chamber in order to pass and maybe they will consider it in the other body, the House of Representatives.

Secondly, is there anybody who thinks we should have clips which I showed with the sheriff of Orange County in Orlando last week—clips that are this long and hold 60 rounds? The law I voted to extend back in 2004 said clips of more than 10 would not be allowed. Is that not reasonable? Is that not common sense? I know how people say, Oh, a person can change a clip in a few seconds. But should we make it easier for a killer so he does not have to change the clip?

The question is one of balance, one of common sense. When I go hunting, I don't have any need for anything more

than 10; indeed, I don't have any need for anything more than a few. In quail hunting, of course, if it is an over-and-under, a hunter has two shells because that is basically the number of shots he is going to get off when the quail flush.

The third element is also one of common sense. The sheriff of Orange County and I held up two guns they confiscated from people using them for criminal purposes. I held up an AK-47. The sheriff held up a Bushmaster. The AK-47 is a derivative of the same weapon used by the North Vietnamese against us in the Vietnam war. I simply asked the question: Are these guns for hunting or are they for killing? The legitimate answer is they are not for hunting, they are for killing. That is what they were designed for, as an assault-type weapon in a combat circumstance.

So how do we approach the legitimate recognition of the second amendment, the right to bear arms, with assault weapons? It seems as though among people of good will using common sense and moderation, we can come to some definitions that would ban those types of assault weapons.

I wish to conclude my remarks by saying this is a lot of politics. Some of us are portrayed, as a result of taking this position of moderation and common sense, as if we were not for the second amendment. That is totally false. Of course I support the second amendment. I just gave my history: growing up in the country, having guns all my life, and still having a number of guns in my house. I support the second amendment. I do so in light of the circumstances in our society today that have changed.

My final comment: In all of the politics going on about this issue, the advocacy organization called the National Rifle Association is not the same NRA that grew up representing the interests of hunters and sportsmen. It has become an advocacy group for gun manufacturers that want to sell more of their manufactured products. So it becomes an economic issue to people instead of one of common sense and moderation.

We need to draw that distinction. This organization—the NRA—has gone to the extreme not only, as we saw, in their response to the elementary school killings in Connecticut, but they have gone to the extreme in my State by advocating in the State legislature getting in between the doctor-patient relationship as to what a doctor can inquire about with regard to a patient concerning a wound that might have come from a gunshot.

This is extremism in the extreme. We ought to call it what it is as we are debating this issue.

Moderation and common sense is the answer to this issue facing us.

Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleague from Rhode Island for his courtesies extended, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NATIONAL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. The Senator from Florida is welcome. It was one of my great pleasures to sit next to him on the Intelligence Committee for these many years. To tell a brief story, whenever Senator NELSON said, Well, I am just a country lawyer from Florida, everybody on the committee perked up, because they had learned from experience that one of the more withering and devastating cross-examinations of a witness was about to ensue. It is always my pleasure to extend courtesy to the Senator from Florida.

I am here once again to talk about climate change. Alarms are ringing, including the voices of the overwhelming majority of scientists, and indeed the voices of the overwhelming majority of Americans. But here in Congress, it is still time for us to wake up.

Climate change is not a problem that will go away; human activity is driving global change. Climate change is not a problem that can wait; we see its effects all around us. But climate change is a problem that can be solved.

We can and we must leave a healthy environment and clean energy sources to our children and grandchildren. The missing piece is Congress. Congress is sleepwalking through history. It is time to wake up.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has confirmed that 2012 was the hottest year in the contiguous United States on record, ever. This one wasn't a close call; it did not come down to the wire; 2012 was a full degree Fahrenheit higher than the previous record year—a full degree Fahrenheit higher than the previous record year. To put that into context, 1 degree may not sound like a lot, but when you average it across an entire year, it is a huge shift. The previous warmest U.S. year on record, 1998, was 4.2 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the coldest year on record, 1917. If you take the warmest year on record—1998 until now—and you take the coldest year on record—1917—the entire span between them is only 4.2 degrees Fahrenheit. This is a jump of a full degree in Fahrenheit in just 1 year. By the way, 2.1 degrees Fahrenheit over 2011 is a seriously big change.

We are just starting to heat up. The most optimistic estimate for the end of the century is a 2-degrees-Fahrenheit increase. That is the most optimistic estimate. More likely scenarios—ones that assume continued current levels of greenhouse gas emissions—project for the continental United States an increase of between 4 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Worldwide, last year was the 36th year in a row with an annual global temperature above the 20th-century average—36 straight years above average. In fact, the 12 years of this century, of the 21st century, 2000 to 2012, every single one of them is in the